

Springtime Startup: The Car Storage Checklist

By Tara Hurlin, 23 March 2016

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Ah, once again the moment that all car nuts in northern climes anxiously await: The smell of spring is in the air and soon we will be able to inhale the familiar memory of our collector car driving through rejuvenated lands and towns with the windows down — pure bliss. Waiting for rain to baptize our roads can be a drag, but now is a perfect time to get your baby ready for another fun-filled driving season.

First, check your fluids.

- It is important to change the engine oil before each driving season: You don't want any water or contaminants that may have piled up over the winter getting into the engine. While you are in there, change the oil filter. The oil has been sitting at the bottom of the oil pan for a while and when you start your engine, you want that filter in tip-top shape as the fluids circulate.
- Check all other fluid levels and note whether any fluids appear dirty. If the transmission fluid smells burnt, it needs a flush, and if your car has been stored for a year or more, you will want to drain and flush all fluids, including transmission, coolant, brake fluid and power steering. And don't get yourself caught in a sticky situation: fill the windshield washer fluid reservoir.
- Draining the gas tank tends to be a topic of debate, but if you choose to do so, don't forget to empty the carburetor bowls and flush the fuel lines. But, if your vehicle was only stored over the winter months and was winterized properly with a fuel stabilizer, this isn't as big of a worry. If you are still concerned, there are ways to test your fuel, such as using a water probe indicator. If water

is found in the gas, a product like E-Zorb can be used — or just bite the bullet and drain all the fuel for a complete refresh.

- If the car has been sitting for an extended period of time, you may want to bleed the brakes to purge the system of any water or impurities. At the very least, make sure the brake and clutch master cylinders are full of fluid. If the fluid is low, there may be a leak somewhere. Before you put the pedal to the metal, make sure that your brakes are firm and in working order, and don't forget to check the operation of the hand-brake!

Inspect your engine bay.

- Check for leaks around the engine bay and underneath the car. Sometimes temperature fluctuations can affect seals and gaskets.
- Examine all of the belts and hoses closely. If there are any cracks, swelling, fraying or any leaks from the hoses, get a replacement. Even if a belt or hose looks borderline, it should be replaced. Summertime heat and humidity fluctuations may leave you stranded on the side of the road.
- Remove the spark plugs, and while checking them to make sure the engine is firing strong on all cylinders, give them a light refresh using a wire brush and spray-on plug cleaner. Before reinstalling, apply di-electric grease on the ends for optimum connection. If your vehicle has been stored for over 90-days, it is recommended to squirt a little oil into each cylinder to lubricate the pistons and rings before re-installing the spark plugs.
- Examine your battery connections: If your battery was kept in the engine compartment, winter weather could have caused corrosion on the connections. If the posts are dirty, remove the cables, negative cable first, then clean them up with a wire brush by using a mix of baking soda and water. When that is complete, make sure the battery is charged and keep it in warm area until you are ready to drive.

- Take a look at the air filter, does it need replacing? If you have an air compressor, remove the filter and blow the dust and dirt remnants off outside. A clean filter allows the engine (and you) to breathe easy.

Then, check everything else.

- Check tire pressure and keep an eye out for any flat spots, worn tread or dry rot. If either of these are found, you might want to consider replacing your tires for optimum safety and handling. And while you are down there, check to make sure all lug nuts have proper torque applied.
- Is your blinker fluid full? While we may be joking, bulbs burn out over time, so check your brake lights, turn signals, headlights and running lights. If you don't have someone to stand outside of the vehicle to help you check, a good way to do it on your own is by backing up against a wall to see the light reflect. Of course, this is easiest to do if it is dark.
- We recommended giving all suspension joints, bushing and pivot points a look-over. Inspect the rubber for any cracks, splits or deterioration. They should be soft and flexible to the touch; any hardened boots will crack. While you are under there, check the shocks for any signs of fluid leaks, and if there are leaks, replace or rebuild them.
- This next one is a given that I probably don't have to mention, because if you are like me you are just itching for nice enough weather to detail your car! But it is important to keep your interior and exterior clean and refreshed. Give it the royal treatment: massage protectant into any leather, check for and touch up any chips that reveal bare metal, and check the condition of rubber seals around doors and windows. A good wash and wax will make your ride shine as bright as your smile on the first driving day.

- Last but not least is perhaps the most commonly forgotten detail: Review your paperwork – make sure your insurance and registration are up to date before taking her back on the road.

All good? Then you are ready for the driving season! Remember, when you first start 'er up, don't rev the engine. Cold oil doesn't flow as well, and putting the pedal down too early could cause bearing and cylinder damage. Instead, let the engine idle until it reaches operating temperature. This is especially important with older classics and turbocharged cars. A shorter 30-minute drive is recommended to start: This will loosen everything up and evaporate any moisture in the exhaust and engine, so when you get back home do another check for any fluid leaks.

Now go out and enjoy the driving season while you still can!